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AUTHOR Renick, Mari Jo
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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between perceptions of intellectual ability, competence at specific academic subjects, and feelings of global self-worth in 166 learning disabled (LD) adolescents (ages 12-18) attending a private school for LD students. It used the Self-Perception Profile for Learning Disabled Students developed by M. J. Renick and S. Harter which contains subscales tapping students' Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, Behavioral Conduct, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-Worth, in addition to separate subscales measuring LD students' perceptions of intellectual ability and competence at reading, spelling/writing, and math. The results indicated that: (1) LD students revealed higher perceptions of intellectual ability than perceived competence in each of the academic domains; (2) the degree to which students feel they are intelligent has little relationship to their academic performance; (3) self-worth is correlated more highly with perceived intellectual ability than with academic performance; and (4) for this sample, perceptions of intelligence and self-worth increase with age while academic performance decreases slightly. Variances in findings from an earlier study indicate that socialization factors may be more favorable in a private academic program for LD students than in public school resource rooms. (Author/VW)

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Measuring the Relationship Between Academic Self-Perceptions and Global Self-Worth:

The Self-Perception Profile for Learning Disabled Students

Mari Jo Renick
University of Denver
Department of Developmental Psychology
2040 S. York
Denver, Colorado 80208

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between learning disabled adolescents' perceptions of intellectual ability, competence at specific academic subjects, and feelings of global self-worth using the Self-Perception Profile for Learning Disabled Students (Renick and Harter, 1986). This measure is a revision of Harter's (1982) Perceived Competence Scale and was designed specifically for use with an LD population. In addition to subscales tapping students' Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, Behavioral Conduct, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-Worth, this scale contains separate subscales measuring LD students' perceptions of intellectual ability and competence at reading, spelling/writing, and math. One hundred sixty-six LD students (ages 12-18) participated in the study. The results indicated that (a) LD students revealed higher perceptions of intellectual ability than perceived competence in each of the academic domains, (b) the degree to which students feel they are intelligent has little relationship to their academic performance, (c) self-worth is correlated more highly with perceived intellectual ability than with academic performance, and (d) for this sample, perceptions of intelligence and self-worth increase with age while academic performance decreases slightly. Socialization factors influencing LD adolescents' perceptions of intellectual ability, competence at specific academic domains, and global self-worth will be addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The present study was designed to examine relationships between academic self-perceptions and perceived global self-worth among learning disabled adolescents using a new measure, The Self-Perception Profile for Learning Disabled Students (Renick and Harter, 1986). This measure was constructed after a recent study (Renick and Harter, 1985) indicated that LD students tend to make greater differentiations in their academic self-perceptions than do normally achieving students. Factor analyses revealed that while normally achieving students differentiate between the Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, and Global Self-Worth subscales of Harter's (1982) Perceived Competence Scale, LD students combine items from the Scholastic Competence and Global Self-Worth subscales to form two new factors. One factor includes those items that reflect the students' perceived intellectual ability and the second factor consists of items tapping students' perceptions of performance in specific academic domains. The Self-Perception Profile for Learning Disabled Students was created to more adequately tap the differentiations made by LD students in their self-perceptions.

MEASURES

The Self-Perception Profile for Learning Disabled Students includes separate subscales measuring students' perceptions of:

Intellectual Ability

Reading Skills

Writing/Spelling Skills

Math Skills

Social Acceptance

Athletic Competence

Physical Appearance

Global Self-Worth

All scores on the measure range from 1.00 to 4.00, with 1.00 indicating low perceptions of competence or adequacy in a domain and 4.00 indicating high self-perceptions.

Importance ratings for each domain are also provided.

AIMS

This study was conducted with three goals in mind:

1) To examine the relationship between LD students' perceptions of general intellectual ability and their perceived performance in specific academic subjects. Given that LD students are frequently provided with messages that their intellectual ability is normal and unrelated to poor academic performance, we predicted that (a) students would reveal higher perceptions of intellectual ability than perceptions of competence in each of the academic areas and (b) correlations between the Intellectual Ability subscale and each of the academic domains would be low.

2) To examine relationships between students' academic self-perceptions and feelings of global self-worth. Based on our previous findings, we predicted that perceived intellectual ability would correlate more highly with global self-worth than would the academic domain scores.

3) To reveal developmental changes in LD adolescents' perceptions of intellectual ability, competence in specific academic domains, and global self-worth.

METHOD

SUBJECTS. One hundred sixty-six students (ages 12-18 years) attending a private school for learning disabled children and adolescents participated in this study. All students showed evidence of an identifiable learning disability, a significant impairment in the students' information processing abilities (i.e. failure to attend, follow directions, retain/recall learned information, integrate and apply conceptual skills), and the students' IQ being with the normal range. None of the students exhibited primary social/emotional disturbance.

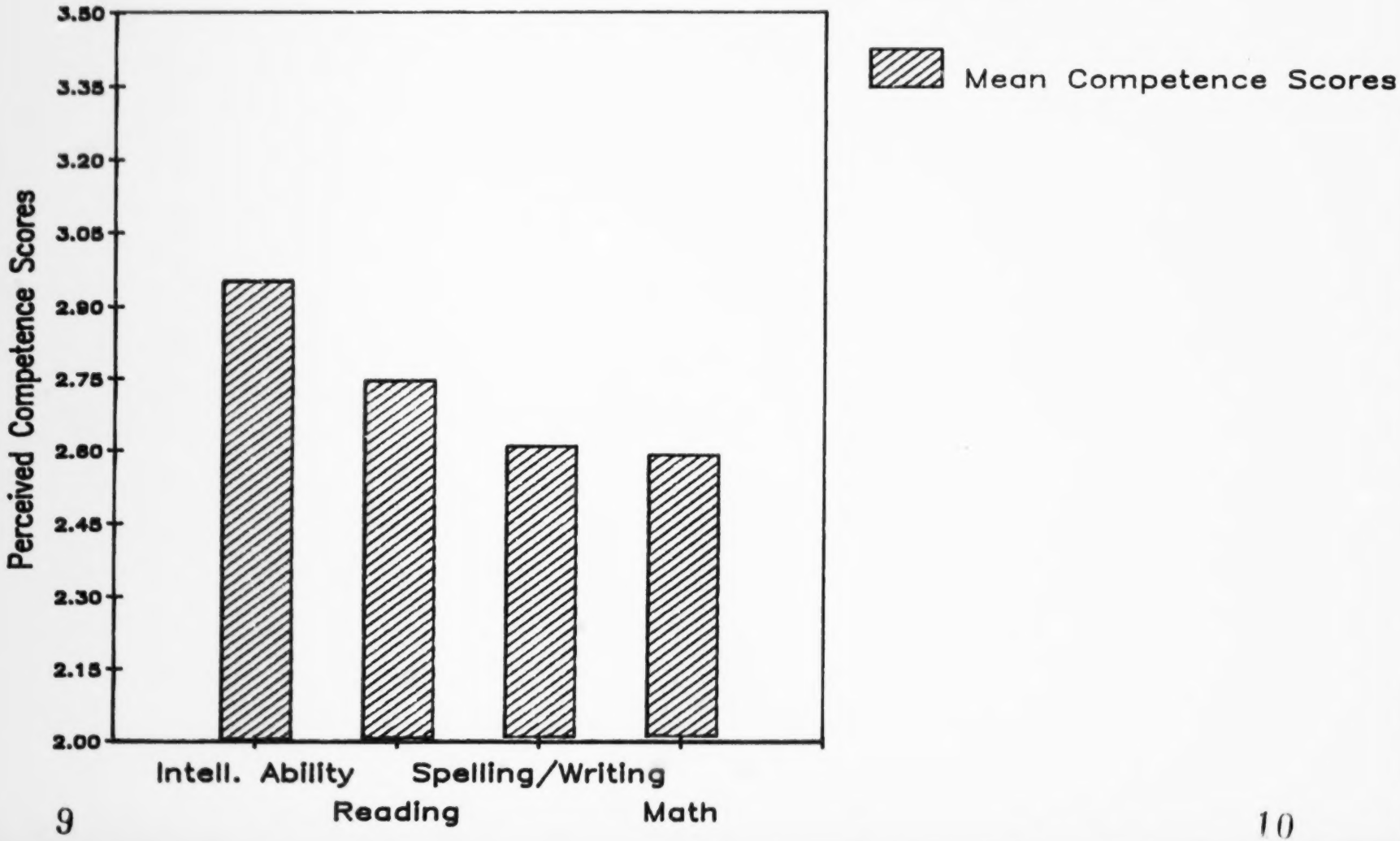
METHOD. The Self-Perception Profile for Learning Disabled Students was administered in small groups of 10-12 students. Items were read to those students evidencing significant reading difficulties.

RESULTS

1) The results generally supported the predictions made for the relationships between LD adolescents' academic self-perceptions and their perceptions of intellectual ability. These relationships are shown in Figure 1. Perceived intellectual ability was found to be significantly higher ($p < .001$) than perceptions of either reading skills, spelling/writing skills, or math skills. With the exception of perceived competence at math, correlations between each of the academic domain scores and perceived intellectual ability ranged from .05 to .31. Math skills were correlated .49 with intellectual ability, indicating that these perceptions are related.

2) Results also supported the prediction that LD adolescents' feelings of global self-worth would be more highly related to their perceptions of intellectual ability than perceived competence at specific academic subjects. Global self-worth was found to correlate .47 with perceived intellectual ability. Correlations between self-worth and each of the academic domains were negligible, ranging from .06 to .18.

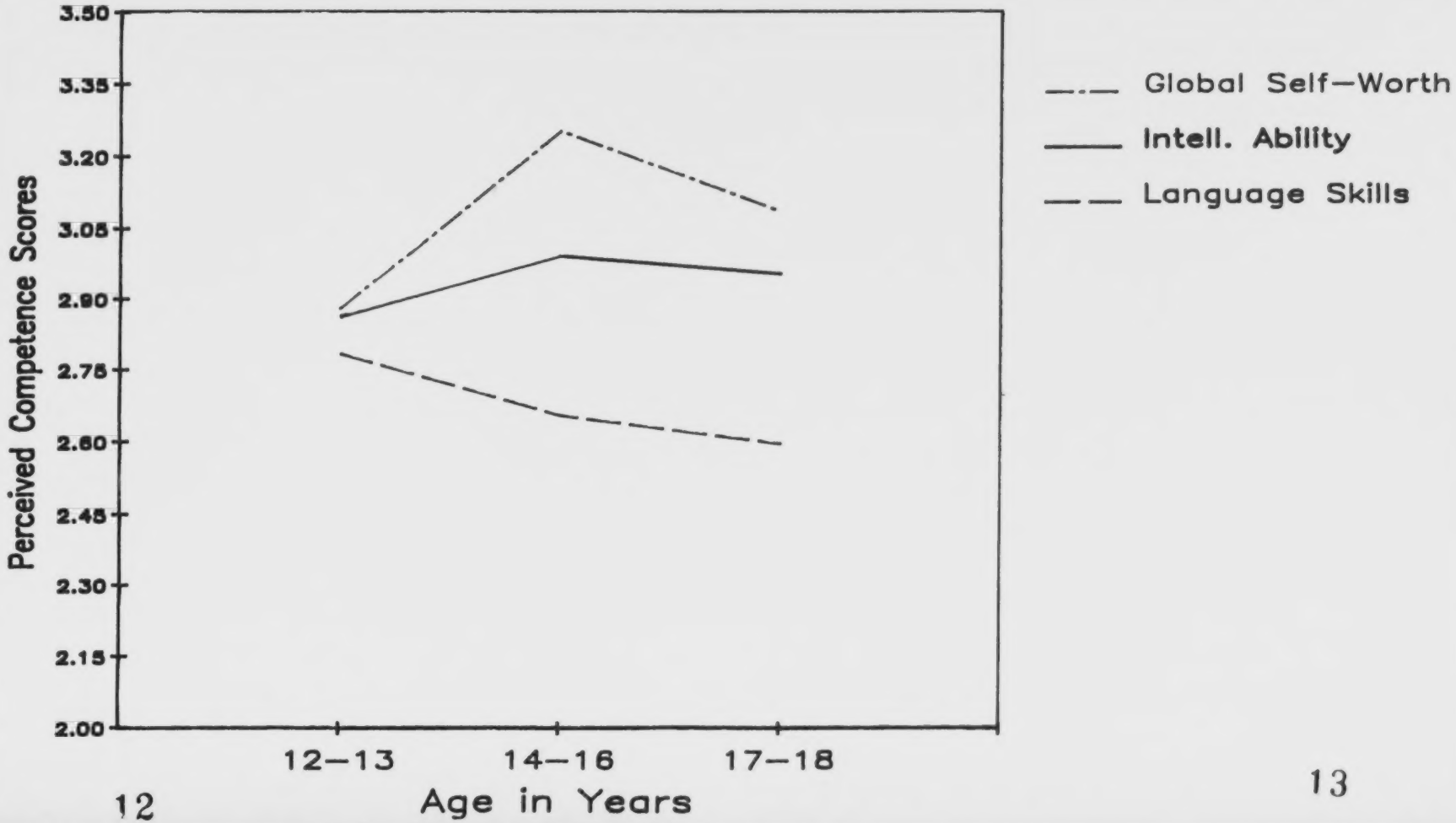
Figure 1. LD Students' Perceived Intellectual Ability and Competence in Specific Academic Subjects



RESULTS, continued

3) Figure 2 shows the obtained developmental trends for students' perceptions of intellectual ability, competence in language skills, and global self-worth. A oneway ANOVA revealed that global self-worth significantly increased ($p < .04$) with development. Although the mean trends revealed a slight increase in perceptions of intellectual ability and a slight decrease in perceptions of competence in language skills, these differences were not statistically significant. Perceptions of competence in math remained stable across these developmental periods.

Figure 2.
Developmental Trends of LD Students' Perceptions of Intellectual Ability, Language Skills, and Global Self–Worth



CONCLUSIONS

The present study demonstrates the following implications for understanding the network of self-perceptions in learning disabled adolescents:

1) Unlike their normally achieving peers, LD students make distinctions between their perceptions of intellectual ability and competence at specific academic subjects. Similar to the manner in which they are identified as LD initially, they tend to perceive themselves as being relatively intelligent yet having difficulties in particular academic domains. Such a differentiation in academic self-perceptions may be related to messages these students receive from socializing agents ("You are smart, you just have a hard time with your reading.")

CONCLUSIONS, continued

2) The extent to which LD students like themselves as persons as measured by the Global Self-Worth subscale appears to be more highly related to their perceptions of intellectual ability than perceived competence in reading, spelling/writing, or math. Interestingly, perceived competence in math was found to be related to these students' perceived intellectual ability while perceptions of competence in either reading or spelling/writing were not related to their perceptions of intelligence.
These results suggest that perceived skill in math may be an important domain for the self-perceptions of LD students given that a strong relationship has been found between perceived intellectual ability and global self-worth. Perhaps because the majority of students are identified as learning disabled due to deficits in their language skills, they tend to base their perceived intelligence on a domain in which they are more competent; for many students this domain may be mathematics. These findings suggest that skill at mathematics may be more critical to LD students' self-concepts than has previously been considered.

CONCLUSIONS, continued

3) The developmental trends suggest that this sample of LD adolescents continue to perceive themselves as being intelligent and to like themselves as persons across the age span of 12 to 18 years. These findings may be unique to students attending a private school specifically for those with learning disabilities; they may not be representative of LD students attending public school programs. Indeed, previous research (Renick and Harter, 1985) has indicated that across grades 3-8, LD children attending public school resource rooms become increasingly doubtful of their intellectual abilities and show decrements in their feelings of global self-worth. Additional social support afforded to the students attending private school programs as well as a comparable social comparison reference group of other LD students with whom to compare oneself may account for differences found between the self-perceptions of LD students attending private and public school programs.

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